

RHYMES CONNECTED WITH NEW-YEAR OBSERVANCES.

THE last day of the old year, and the first of the new, are generally observed throughout Scotland with much festivity. Till a recent period, this festivity approached to license, and, from the frantic merriment which reigned in most minds, the time was called the *Daft* (that is, Mad) *Days*. Now, these follies are much corrected. The only other day about this period which was held in any respect was *Handsel Monday*—that is, the first Monday of the year—on which day people made presents (handsels) to their friends, particularly to those of tender age. Handsel Monday was also a favourite day for family meetings; and in some rural districts it is still such; but in these cases the day according to old style is usually preferred.

Christmas and Twelfth Night, days so much observed in England, attract no regard in Scotland: the latter may be said to be not only unrecognised, but unknown. This is no doubt owing to the persevering efforts made by the Presbyterian clergy, for a century after the Reformation, to extinguish all observance of Christmas. In the Highlands alone, and amongst Episcopalian families in large towns, is the festival of the Nativity held in any regard. In the Lowlands, there exists amongst the people only a shadowy traditionary idea of its character as a holiday and day of feasting. The boys have a rhyme—

On Christmas night I turned the spit,
I burnt my fingers—I find it yet.

And in Fife there is another stanza alluding to its festive character—

Yule's come, and Yule's gane,
And we ha'e feasted weel;
Sae Jock maun to his flail again,
And Jenny to her wheel.

Scotland has also in its time partaken of the old religious rites with which Christmas used to be celebrated at the peasant's fireside. The boys are still well acquainted with the rhyme alluded to in Ellis's edition of Brand's *Popular An-*

tiquities, as having been descriptive of, or allusive to, a certain domestic ceremony—

Yule, Yule, Yule,
 Three puddings in a pule !
 Crack nuts and cry Yule !

These are faint memorials of the Scottish Christmas or Yule, but they tend to illustrate the remark of Coleridge as to the difficulty of altogether erasing the marks of 'that which once hath been.' They show that even a high religious principle may fail to extinguish the humblest and homeliest custom, if it once be a custom, and have any recommendation from the universal taste for amusement. Old ballads allude to the *hallow* (or holy) *days* of Yule—

'When the hallow days o' Yule were come,
 And the nights were lang and mirk,
 Then in and came her ain twa sons,
 And their hats made o' the birk.'

—*The Clerk's Twa Sons of Owsenford.*

It is here to be observed that Christmas was only known in Scotland by the term Yule, a word also retained in some parts of England. The Court of Session had its 'Yule vacance;' people spoke of keeping good clothes for 'Pace and Yule;' and there was a notable proverb, to the effect that a 'Green Yule makes a fat kirkyard;' which, by the way, modern statisticians ascertain to be not true, the fact being, that a hard winter is always the most fatal to human life.* Yule, or Iol, was in reality the great annual festival of the ancient Scandinavians—a time of unlimited feasting, drinking, and dancing; and upon it the early Christian missionaries ingrafted the festival of the Nativity, in order to give as little disturbance as possible to the customs of the people. Thus, in celebrating this festival, the name of the old one was naturally retained.

An intelligent anonymous writer informs us that in Forfarshire a tenacious clinging to Christmas observances was observable so late as the latter half of the eighteenth century. 'On Christmas-Eve, better known by the name of *Yule-E'en*, the goodwife was busily employed in baking her Yule bread; and if a bannock fell asunder, after being put to the fire, it was an omen that she would never see

* See Quetelet, *Sur L'Homme.*

another Yule. . . . From the cottar to the laird, every one had *fat brose* [oatmeal in a menstruum of skimmings] on Yule-Day morning, after which all were at liberty to go where they pleased. The day was a kind of saturnalia, on which the most rigorous master relinquished his claim to the service of his domestics. The females visited their friends, and the young men generally met at some rendezvous, to try their skill as marksmen at a wadd-shooting—that is, firing with ball at a mark for small prizes of blacksmith or joiner work. These were paid for by the contributions of the candidates (each laying down his twopence or threepence), and carried off by him who hit nearest the mark. . . . When darkness prevented the continuance of shooting, a raffle in the alehouse generally followed, while cards and hard drinking closed the scene.’—*Correspondent of Literary and Statistical Magazine*, 1819.

While thus endeared to the people, the clergy were indefatigable in their efforts to put down all Christmas observances whatever. The writer just quoted tells us a pertinent anecdote relative to a certain Mr Goodsir, minister of Monikie, in Forfarshire, who made it a rule to go over as much of his parish as possible on that day, ‘that he might detect his parishioners in any superstitious observances. Upon a visitation of this kind, he entered the village of Guildy, and inspected every house, to see whether the people were at their ordinary employments, or if they were cooking a better dinner than usual. One old wife, whose pot was playing brown over the fire, saw him coming through her kail-yard. She had just time to lift off the pot, but in her agitation could find no better place to hide it than below her bed-cover. This accomplished, she had got seated at her spinning-wheel by the time that his reverence entered, who paid her some compliments upon her conduct, contrasting it with that of some of her neighbours, who showed less disposition to comply with the austerity of his injunctions. Maggy, in her solicitude to escape detection, overshot her own mark, for she echoed her minister’s remarks so zealously, that he felt a pleasure in prolonging his stay; but unfortunately for both, during the bitter censure of those who offered unrighteous sacrifice, or still “longed for the flesh pots of Egypt,” Maggy’s pot set fire to the bed-clothes, and the smoke came curling over the minister’s

shoulders. Maggy started up, flew to the bed, and in her hurry to remove the clothes, upset the tell-tale pot, splashing Mr Goodsir's legs with the hot and fat broth, &c. The consequence may easily be conjectured. Maggy's conduct was reported to the elder of the quarter; she became the laughing-stock of her neighbours; and had further to do public penance before the congregation for the complicated crimes of heresy and hypocrisy.'

But we hasten from Christmas to Hogmanay—from the shadow to the substance. Hogmanay is the universal popular name in Scotland for the last day of the year. It is a day of high festival among young and old—but particularly the young, who do not regard any of the rest of the Daft Days with half so much interest. It is still customary, in retired and primitive towns, for the children of the poorer class of people to get themselves on that morning swaddled in a great sheet, doubled up in front, so as to form a vast pocket, and then to go along the streets in little bands, calling at the doors of the wealthier classes for an expected dole of oaten bread. Each child gets one quadrant section of oat-cake (sometimes, in the case of particular favourites, improved by an addition of cheese), and this is called their *hogmanay*. In expectation of the large demands thus made upon them, the housewives busy themselves for several days beforehand in preparing a suitable quantity of cakes. A particular individual, in my own knowledge, has frequently resolved two bolls of meal into hogmanay cakes. The children, on coming to the door, cry 'Hogmanay!' which is in itself a sufficient announcement of their demands; but there are other exclamations, which either are or might be used for the same purpose. One of these is—

Hogmanay,
Trollolay,

Give us of your white bread, and none of your gray!

What is precisely meant by the mysterious word *hogmanay*, or by the still more inexplicable *trollolay*, has been a subject fertile in dispute to Scottish antiquaries, as the reader will find by an inspection of the *Archæologia Scottica*. A suggestion of the late Professor Robison of Edinburgh seems the best, that the word hogmanay was derived from '*Au qui menez*' ('To the mistletoe go'), which mummers formerly

cried in France at Christmas. At the same time, it was customary for these persons to rush unceremoniously into houses, playing antic tricks, and bullying the inmates for money and choice victuals, crying, ‘*Tire-lire* (referring to a small money-box they carried), *maint du blanc, et point du bas.*’ These various cries, it must be owned, are as like as possible to

Hogmanay,
Trollolay,
Give us of your white bread, and none of your gray!

Of the many other cries appropriate to the morning of Hogmanay, some of the less puerile may be chronicled—

Get up, goodwife, and shake your feathers,
And dinna think that we are beggars ;
For we are bairns come out to play,
Get up and gie’s our hogmanay !

The following is of a moralising character, though a good deal of a truism :—

Get up, goodwife, and binna sweir,
And deal your bread to them that’s here ;
For the time will come when ye’ll be dead,
And then ye’ll neither need ale nor bread.

One is in a very peevish strain ; but, as saith the sage, ‘Blessed is he that expects little, for he will not be disappointed’—

My shoon are made of hoary hide,
Behind the door I downa bide ;
My tongue is sair, I daurna sing—
I fear I will get little thing.

The most favourite of all, however, is much smarter, more laconic, and more to the point, than any of the foregoing—

My feet’s cauld, my shoon’s thin ;
Gie’s my cakes, and let me rin !

It is no unpleasing scene, during the forenoon, to see the children going laden home, each with his large apron bellying out before him, stuffed full of cakes, and perhaps scarcely able to waddle under the load. Such a mass of oaten alms is no inconsiderable addition to the comfort of the poor man’s household, and tends to make the season still more worthy of its jocund title.

In the Highlands, the first night of the year is marked by a curious custom, of superstitious appearance, of which no trace exists in the Lowlands. Young and old having collected, probably at some substantial farmer's house, one of the stoutest of the party gets a dried cow's hide, which he drags behind him. The rest follow, beating the hide with sticks, and singing—

Collin a Chuilig,
 Bhuigh bhoichin,
 Buol in chraichin,
 Callich si chuil,
 Callich si chiel,
 Callich cli in ceun im tennie,
 Bir na da Huil,
 Bir na Gillie,
 Chollin so.

Translated literally thus—

Hug man a',
 Yellow bag,
 Beat the skin,
 Carlin in neuk,
 Carlin in kirk,
 Carlin ben at the fire,
 Spit in her two eyes,
 Spit in her stomach,
 Hug man a'.

After going round the house three times, they all halt at the door, and each person utters an extempore rhyme, extolling the hospitality of the landlord and landlady; after which they are plentifully regaled with bread, butter, cheese, and whisky. Before leaving the house, one of the party burns the breast part of the skin of a sheep, and puts it to the nose of every one, that all may smell it, as a charm against witchcraft and every infection.

In the primitive parish of Deerness, in Orkney, it was customary, at the beginning of the present century, for old and young of the common class of people to assemble in a great band upon the evening of the last day of the year, and proceed upon a round of visits throughout the district. At every house they knocked at the door, and on being admitted, commenced singing, to a tune of its own, a song appropriate to the occasion, which has been placed before

me in a form not the most satisfactory to an antiquary, but the best that circumstances admitted of—namely, with a number of verses composed as much from imagination as from memory, to make out something like the whole piece. These are marked with a dagger (†). It is obvious that ‘*Queen Mary*’ is a corruption for the name of the blessed Virgin.

This night it is guid New'r E'en's night,
We're a' here Queen Mary's men ;
And we're come here to crave our right,
And that's before our lady.

The very first thing which we do crave,
We're a' here Queen Mary's men ;
A bonny white candle we must have,
And that's before our lady.

Goodwife, gae to your butter ark,
And weigh us here ten mark.

Ten mark, ten pund,
Look that ye grip weel to the grund.*

Goodwife, gae to your geelin vat,
And fetch us here a skeel o' that.

†Gang to your awmrie, gin ye please,
And bring frae there a yow-milk cheese.

And syne bring here a sharpening-stane,
We'll sharp our whittles ilka ane.

Ye'll cut the cheese, and eke the round,
But aye take care ye cutna your thoom.

†Gae fill the three-pint cog o' ale,
The maut maun be aboon the meal.

†We houp your ale is stark and stout,
For men to drink the auld year out.

Ye ken the weather's snaw and sleet,
Stir up the fire to warm our feet.

Our shoon's made o' mare's skin,
Come open the door, and let's in.

The inner door being opened, a tremendous rush took place towards the interior. The inmates furnished a long table

* In stooping into a deep ark, or chest, there is of course a danger of falling in, unless the feet be kept firm to the ground.

with all sorts of homely fare, and a hearty feast took place, followed by copious libations of ale, charged with all sorts of good wishes. The party would then proceed to the next house, where a similar scene would be enacted: Heaven knows how they contrived to take so many suppers in one evening! No slight could be more keenly felt by a Deerness farmer than to have his house passed over unvisited by the New-Year singers.

The doings of the *guizards* (that is, masquers) form a conspicuous feature in the New-Year proceedings throughout Scotland. The evenings on which these personages are understood to be privileged to appear, are those of Christmas, Hogmanay, New-Year's Day, and Handsel Monday. Such of the boys as can pretend to anything like a voice, have for weeks before been thumbing the collection of excellent new songs, which lies like a bunch of rags in the window sole; and being now able to screech up 'Barbara Allan,' or the 'Wee cot-house and the wee kail-yardie,' they determine upon enacting the part of guizards. For this purpose they don old shirts belonging to their fathers, and mount casques of brown paper, shaped so like a mitre, that I am tempted to believe them borrowed from the Abbot of Un-reason: attached to this is a sheet of the same paper, which, falling down in front, covers and conceals the whole face, except where holes are made to let through the point of the nose, and afford sight to the eyes and breath to the mouth. Each vocal guizard is, like a knight of old, attended by a kind of humble squire, who assumes the habiliments of a girl, with an old woman's cap, and a broomstick, and is styled 'Bessie.' Bessie is equal in no respect, except that she shares fairly in the proceeds of the enterprise. She goes before her principal; opens all the doors at which he pleases to exert his singing powers; and busies herself, during the time of the song, in sweeping the floor with her broomstick, or in playing any other antics that she thinks may amuse the indwellers. The common reward of this entertainment is a halfpenny; but many churlish persons fall upon the unfortunate guizards, and beat them out of the house. Let such persons, however, keep a good watch upon their cabbage gardens next Halloween.

The more important doings of the guizards are of a theatrical character. There is one rude and grotesque

drama which they are accustomed to perform on each of the four above-mentioned nights, and which, in various fragments or versions, exists in every part of Lowland Scotland. The performers, who are never less than three, but sometimes as many as six, having dressed themselves, proceed in a band from house to house, generally contenting themselves with the kitchen for an arena, whither, in mansions presided over by the spirit of good-humour, the whole family will resort to witness the spectacle. Sir Walter Scott, who delighted to keep up old customs, and could condescend to simple things without losing genuine dignity, invariably had a set of guizards to perform this play before his family both at Ashestiel and Abbotsford. The editor has with some difficulty obtained what appears a tolerably complete copy.

GALATIAN, A NEW-YEAR PLAY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ—*Two Fighting-men or Knights, one of whom is called BLACK KNIGHT, the other GALATIAN (sometimes GALATIUS or GALGACUS), and alternatively JOHN; a Doctor; a fourth Personage, who plays the same talking and demonstrating part with the Chorus in the Greek drama; a Young Man, who is little more than a bystander; and JUDAS, the purse-bearer.*

Galatian is (at the royal burgh of Peebles) dressed in a good whole shirt, tied round the middle with a handkerchief, from which hangs a wooden sword. He has a large cocked-hat of white paper, either cut out with little human profiles, or pasted over with penny valentines. The Black Knight is more terrific in appearance, his dress being, if possible, of tartan, and his head surmounted by an old cavalry cap, while his white stockings are all tied round with red tape. A pair of flaming whiskers adds to the ferocity of his aspect. The Doctor is attired in any faded black clothes which can be had, with a hat probably stolen from a neighbouring scarecrow.

Enter TALKING MAN, and speaks.

Haud away rocks, and haud away reels,
 Haud away stocks and spinning-wheels.
 Redd room for Gorland, and gi'e us room to sing,
 And I will show you the prettiest thing
 That ever was seen in Christmas time.
 Muckle head and little wit, stand ahint the door;
 But sic a set as we are, ne'er were here before.
 —Show yourself, Black Knight!

Enter BLACK KNIGHT, and speaks.

Here comes in Black Knight, the great king of Macedon,
 Who has conquered all the world but Scotland alone.
 When I came to Scotland my heart it grew cold,
 To see a little nation so stout and so bold—
 So stout and so bold, so frank and so free :
 Call upon Galatian to fight wi' me.

Enter GALATIAN, and speaks.

Here come I, Galatian ; Galatian is my name ;
 Sword and buckler by my side, I hope to win the game.

BLACK KNIGHT.

The game, sir, the game, sir, it is not in your power ;
 I'll hash you and slash you in less than half an hour.*

* The following is the commencement of the play, as performed in the neighbourhood of Falkirk :—

Open your door and let us in,
 We hope your favour for to win ;
 We're none of your roguish sort,
 But come of your noble train.
 If you don't believe what I say,
 I'll call in the king of Macedon,
 And he shall clear his way !

Enter KING.

Here in come I, the great king of Macedon ;
 I've conquered this world round and round ;
 But when I came to Scotland, my courage grew so cold,
 To see a little nation so stout and so bold ;

* * * *

If you don't believe what I say,
 I'll call in Prince George of Ville, and he shall clear his way !

Enter PRINCE GEORGE of Ville.

Here in come I, Prince George of Ville,
 A Ville of valiant light [might ?] ;
 Here I sit and spend my right,
 * * * and reason ;
 Here I draw my bloody weapon,
 My bloody weapon shines so clear,
 I'll run it right into your ear.
 If you don't believe what I say,
 I'll call in the Slasher, and he shall clear his way !

Enter SLASHER.

Here in come I, Slasher ; Slasher is my name ;
 With sword and buckler by my side, I hope to win the game.

My head is made of iron, my heart is made of steel,
And my sword is a Ferrara, that can do its duty weel.

[They fight, and Galatian is worsted, and falls.]

Down, Jack, down to the ground you must go.
Oh! oh! what is this I've done?—
I've killed my brother Jack, my father's only son.

TALKING MAN.

Here's two bloody champions that never fought before;
And we are come to rescue him, and what can we do more?
Now, Galatian he is dead, and on the floor is laid,
And ye shall suffer for it, I'm very sore afraid.

BLACK KNIGHT.

I'm sure it was not I, sir; I'm innocent of the crime:
'Twas this young man behind me, who drew the sword sae
fine.

The YOUNG MAN answers.

Oh, you awful villain! to lay the blame on me;
When my two eyes were shut, sir, when this young man did
die.

BLACK KNIGHT.

How could your two eyes be shut, when you were looking on?
How could your two eyes be shut, when their swords were
drawn?
—Is there ever a doctor to be found?

TALKING MAN

Call in Dr Brown,
The best in all the town.

Enter DOCTOR, and says—

Here comes in as good a doctor as ever Scotland bred,
And I have been through nations, a-learning of my trade;
And now I've come to Scotland all for to cure the dead.

BLACK KNIGHT.

What can you cure?

DOCTOR.

I can cure the rury scurvy,
And the rumble-gumption of a man that has been seven
years in his grave or more;
I can make an old woman of sixty look like a girl of sixteen.

BLACK KNIGHT.

What will you take to cure this dead man ?

DOCTOR.

Ten pounds.

BLACK KNIGHT.

Will not one do ?

DOCTOR.

No.

BLACK KNIGHT.

Will not three do ?

DOCTOR.

No.

BLACK KNIGHT.

Will not five do ?

DOCTOR.

No.

BLACK KNIGHT.

Will not seven do ?

DOCTOR.

No.

BLACK KNIGHT.

Will not nine do ?

DOCTOR.

Yes, perhaps—nine may do, and a pint of wine.
 I have a little bottle of *inker-pinker** in my pocket.
 (*Aside to GALATIAN.*) Take a little drop of it.
 By the hocus-pocus, and the magical touch of my little finger,
 Start up, John !

GALATIAN rises, and exclaims—

Oh, my back !

DOCTOR.

What ails your back ?

GALATIAN.

There's a hole in't you may turn your nieve ten times round
 in it.

* Small beer.

DOCTOR.

How did you get it ?

GALATIAN.

Fighting for our land.

DOCTOR.

How many did you kill ?

GALATIAN.

I killed a' the loons but ane, that ran, and wadna stand.

[*The whole party dance, and Galatian sings.*]

Oh, once I was dead, sir, but now I am alive,
And blessed be the doctor that made me revive.

We'll all join hands, and never fight more,
We'll a' be good brothers, as we have been before.

Enter JUDAS with the bag, and speaks.

Here comes in Judas ; Judas is my name ;
If ye put not siller in my bag, for guid sake mind our wame !
When I gaed to the castle yett, and tirl'd at the pin,
They keepit the keys o' the castle, and wadna let me in.
I've been i' the east carse,
I've been i' the west carse,
I've been i' the Carse o' Gowrie,
Where the cluds rain a' day pease and beans,
And the farmers theek houses wi' needles and prins.
I've seen geese gawn on pattens,
And swine fleeing i' the air like peelings o' ingons !
Our hearts are made o' steel, but our bodies sma' as ware—
If you've onything to gi'e us, *stap it in there.**

FINALE SUNG BY THE PARTY.

Blessed be the master o' this house, and the mistress also,
And all the little babies that round the table grow ;
Their pockets full of money, the bottles full of beer—
A merry Christmas, guizards, and a happy New-Year.

* In the west of Scotland, instead of Judas and his speech, enter a Demon or Giant, with a large stick over his shoulder, and singing—

Here come I, auld Beelzebub ;
Over my shoulders I carry my club,
In my hand a dripping-pan ;
Am not I a jolly old man ?

Here come I, auld Diddletie-doubt,
Gi'e me money, or I'll sweep ye a' out.
Money I want, and money I crave ;
If ye don't gi'e me money, I'll sweep ye till your grave.

Mr Hone's *Every-Day Book* presented several communications, making it clear that a play greatly resembling the above is acted in many parts of England, on Christmas evening, by young persons called Mummers, or Old Father Christmas Boys. A full copy of this drama, as performed at Whitehaven, was printed in eight pages octavo, by T. Wilson of that town; and from parts of it extracted by one of Mr Hone's correspondents, we find that the leading characters are Alexander the Great, the king of Egypt, and Prince George, son of the latter monarch. Alexander and Prince George fight, as the Black Knight and Galatian do in the Scottish play. The following passage may serve as a specimen:—

'P. George. I am Prince George, a champion brave and bold,
 For with my spear I've won three crowns of gold:
 'Twas I that brought the dragon to the slaughter,
 And I that gained the Egyptian monarch's daughter;
 In Egypt's fields I prisoner long was kept,
 But by my valour I from them escaped;
 I sounded loud at the gate of a divine,
 And out came a giant of no good design;
 He gave me a blow which almost struck me dead,
 But I up with my sword, and cut off his head.

Alex. Hold, Slacker, hold; pray do not be so hot,
 For in this spot thou know'st not who thou'st got;
 'Tis I that's to hash thee and smash thee as small as flies,
 And send thee to Satan to make mince pies.
 Mince pies hot, mince pies cold,
 I'll send thee to Satan ere thou'rt three days old:
 But hold, Prince George, before you go away,
 Either you or I must die this bloody day;
 Some mortal wounds thou shalt receive by me,
 So let us fight it out most manfully.'

Mr Sandys, in his elegant volume of *Christmas Carols* (1833), transcribes a play called *St George*, which is still acted at the new year in Cornwall, exactly after the manner of our Scottish play of *Galatian*, which it resembles as much as various versions of *Galatian* in Scotland resemble each other. The leading characters, besides St George himself and the Dragon, which is twice killed, are a Turkish knight and the king of Egypt. It is curious thus to find one play, with unimportant variations, preserved traditionally by the common people in parts of the island so distant from each other, and in many respects so different.

Still more curious it is to consider of what an ancient

custom this is a relic and living memorial. The simple swains of Peeblesshire, when they shuffle into the houses of their neighbours to play *Galatian*, little think that such goings-on were strictly forbidden by the Concilium Africanum in the year 408, as well as by another council of the church at Auxerre in Burgundy in 614. The Plantagenet kings of England were regularly regaled every Christmas with such plays; and even down to the time of Elizabeth, a play was one of the constant amusements of Christmas in the universities and inns of court. If we were to judge of the antiquity of *Galatian* from its language, we would assign it to the early part of the sixteenth century, on account of its resemblance to the structure of verse found in such specimens of primeval English comedy as *Ralph Royster Doyster*, and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, which were productions of the reign of Mary.

The rhymes connected with the performance of the *Sword-Dance*, an ancient Scandinavian amusement, which lingered till a recent period in Shetland, bear a considerable resemblance to those of *Galatian*. They have fortunately been preserved in a succession of copies, the last of which was written, about 1788, by Mr William Henderson, younger of Papa Stour, one of the remotest of the Shetland islands, where the dance or ballet is even now sometimes performed. This document is given by Sir Walter Scott amongst the notes which he latterly appended to the novel of *The Pirate*:—

‘WORDS USED AS A PRELUDE TO THE SWORD-DANCE, A DANISH OR NORWEGIAN BALLET, COMPOSED SOME CENTURIES AGO, AND PRESERVED IN PAPA STOUR, ZETLAND.

PERSONÆ DRAMATIS.*

Enter MASTER, in the character of St GEORGE.

Brave gentles all within this boor,†
 If ye delight in any sport,
 Come see me dance upon this floor,
 Which to you all shall yield comfort.
 Then shall I dance in such a sort,
 As possible I may or can;

* So placed in the old MS.

† *Boor*—so spelt, to accord with the vulgar pronunciation of the word *bower*.

You, minstrel men, play me a porte,*
That I on this floor may prove a man.

[He bows, and dances in a line.]

Now have I danced with heart and hand,
Brave gentles all, as you may see ;
For I have been tried in many a land,
As yet the truth can testify :
In England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy, and Spain,
Have I been tried with that good sword of steel.

[Draws and flourishes.]

Yet I deny that ever a man did make me yield ;
For in my body there is strength,
As by my manhood may be seen ;
And I with that good sword of length,
Have oftentimes in perils been,
And over champions I was king.
And by the strength of this right hand,
Once on a day I killed fifteen,
And left them dead upon the land.
Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care,
But play to me a porte most light,
That I no longer do forbear,
But dance in all these gentles' sight ;
Although my strength makes you abased,
Brave gentles all, be not afraid,
For here are six champions, with me, staid,
All by my manhood I have raised.
Since I have danced, I think it best
To call my brethren in your sight,
That I may have a little rest,
And they may dance with all their might ;
With heart and hand as they are knights,
And shake their swords of steel so bright,
And show their main strength on this floor,
For we shall have another bout
Before we pass out of this door.
Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care
To play to me a porte most light,
That I no longer do forbear,
But dance in all these gentles' sight.

[He dances.]

[He dances, and then introduces his knights, as follows.]

* *Porte*—so spelt in the original. The word is known as indicating a piece of music on the bagpipe, to which ancient instrument, which is of Scandinavian origin, the sword-dance may have been originally composed.

Stout James of Spain, both tried and stour,*
 Thine acts are known full well indeed ;
 And Champion Dennis, a French knight,
 Who stout and bold is to be seen ;
 And David, a Welshman born,
 Who is come of noble blood ;
 And Patrick also, who blew the horn,
 An Irish knight, amongst the wood.
 Of Italy, brave Anthony the good,
 And Andrew of Scotland king ;
 St George of England, brave indeed,
 Who to the Jews wrought muckle tinte.†
 A way with this !—Let us come to sport ;
 Since that ye have a mind to war,
 Since that ye have this bargain sought,
 Come let us fight, and do not fear.
 Therefore, brave minstrel, do not care
 To play to me a porte most light,
 That I no longer do forbear,
 But dance in all these gentles' sight.

[*He dances, and advances to JAMES of Spain.*

Stout James of Spain, both tried and stour,
 Thine acts are known full well indeed,
 Present thyself within our sight,
 Without either fear or dread.
 Count not for favour or for feid,
 Since of thy acts thou hast been sure ;
 Brave James of Spain, I will thee lead
 To prove thy manhood on this floor. [JAMES dances.
 Brave Champion Dennis, a French knight,
 Who stout and bold is to be seen,
 Present thyself here in our sight,
 Thou brave French knight,
 Who bold hast been ;
 Since thou such valiant acts hast done,
 Come let us see some of them now ;
 With courtesy, thou brave French knight,
 Draw out thy sword of noble hue.

[DENNIS dances, while the others retire to a side.

Brave David a bow must string, and with awe
 Set up a wand upon a stand,

* *Stour*—great.

† *Muckle tinte*—much loss or harm ; so in MS.

And that brave David will cleave in twa.*

[DAVID *dances solus.*

Here is, I think, an Irish knight,
 Who does not fear, or does not fright,
 To prove thyself a valiant man,
 As thou hast done full often bright ;
 Brave Patrick, dance, if that thou can. [He dances.
 Thou stout Italian, come thou here ;
 Thy name is Anthony, most stout ;
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear,
 And do thou fight without any doubt ;
 Thy leg thou shake, thy neck thou lout, †
 And show some courtesy on this floor,
 For we shall have another bout,
 Before we pass out of this boor.
 Thou kindly Scotsman, come thou here ;
 Thy name is Andrew of fair Scotland ;
 Draw out thy sword that is most clear,
 Fight for thy king with thy right hand ;
 And aye as long as thou canst stand,
 Fight for thy king with all thy heart ;
 And then, for to confirm his band,
 Make all his enemies for to smart.

[He dances.

[He dances.

(*Music begins.*)

FIGUR. ‡

‘The six stand in rank, with their swords reclining on their shoulders. The master (St George) dances, and then strikes the sword of James of Spain, who follows George, then dances, strikes the sword of Dennis, who follows behind James. In like manner, the rest—the music playing—swords as before. After the six are brought out of rank, they and the master form a circle, and hold the swords point and hilt. This circle is danced round twice. The whole, headed by the master, pass under the swords held in a vaulted manner. They jump over the swords. This naturally places the swords across, which they disentangle by passing under their right sword. They take up the seven swords, and form a circle, in which they dance round.

* Something is evidently amiss or omitted here. David probably exhibited some feat of archery.

† *Lout*—to bend or bow down, pronounced *loot*, as *doubt* is *doot* in Scotland.

‡ *Figuir*—so spelt in MS.

'The master runs under the sword opposite, which he jumps over backwards. The others do the same. He then passes under the right-hand sword, which the others follow; in which position they dance, until commanded by the master, when they form into a circle, and dance round as before. They then jump over the right-hand sword, by which means their backs are to the circle, and their hands across their backs. They dance round in that form until the master calls "Loose," when they pass under the right sword, and are in a perfect circle.

'The master lays down his sword, and lays hold of the point of James's sword. He then turns himself, James, and the others, into a clew. When so formed, he passes under out of the midst of the circle; the others follow; they vault as before. After several other evolutions, they throw themselves into a circle, with their arms across the breast. They afterwards form such figures as to make a shield of their swords, and the shield is so compact, that the master and his knights dance alternately with this shield upon their heads. It is then laid down upon the floor. Each knight lays hold of their former points and hilts with their hands across, which disentangle by figures directly contrary to those that formed the shield. This finishes the ballet.

EPILOGUE.

Mars does rule, he bends his brows,
 He makes us all agast;*
 After the few hours that we stay here,
 Venus will rule at last.
 Farewell, farewell, brave gentles all,
 That herein do remain;
 I wish you health and happiness,
 Till we return again.

[*Exeunt.*']* *Agast*—so spelt in MS.